



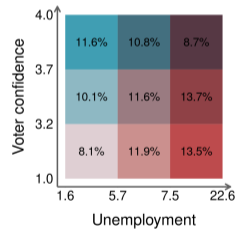
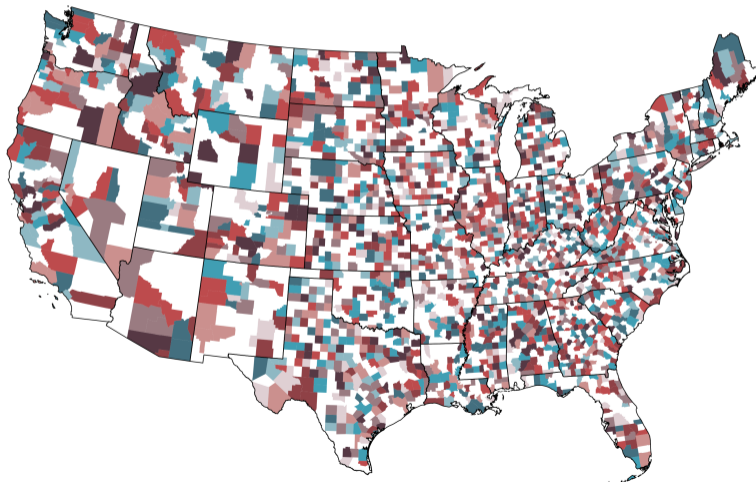
Social Context, Unemployment, and Local News: A New Look at Voter Confidence

Murat Abus Johanna Dunaway 2025 ESRA Conference June 10, 2025

Introduction

- The economy is an important determinant of voting behavior. Unemployment at the local level is used to evaluate incumbents like mayors.
- Consequences of decline of local news include important political outcomes (polarized voting behavior, corruption among state officials, lower turnout and less competitive local elections)

Introduction



The Question

- Assumption of independence in political behavior research

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- Effect of social context “sense of community” on trust in local institutions

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- Assumption of independence in political behavior research
- Effect of social context “sense of community” on trust in local institutions
- Can factors like unemployment and local news affect voter confidence through their impact on sense of community?

Significance of the Question (So What?)

- Based on the centrality of voter confidence for democracy, if there are indeed previously untheorized effects operating through social context, the added explanatory power brings us closer to a fuller understanding of voter confidence.

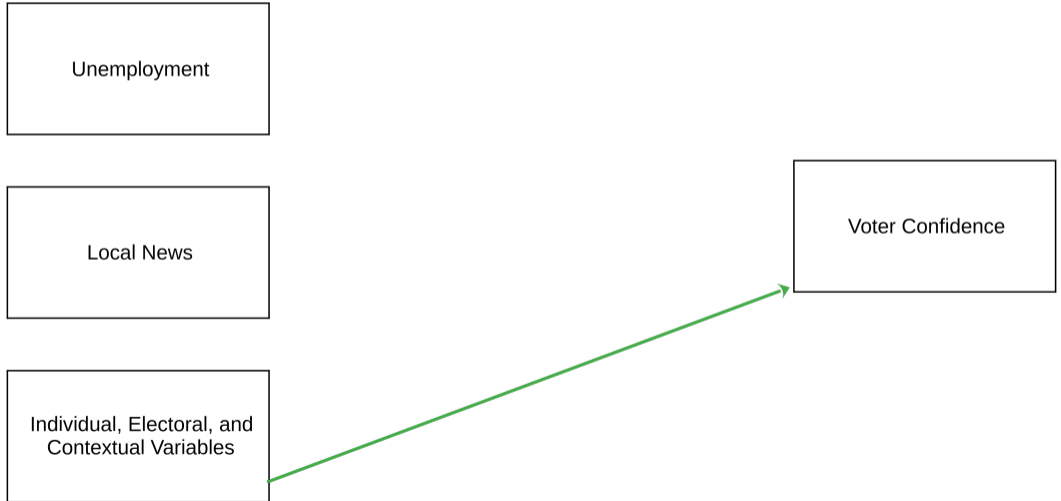
Significance of the Question (So What?)

- Based on the centrality of voter confidence for democracy, if there are indeed previously untheorized effects operating through social context, the added explanatory power brings us closer to a fuller understanding of voter confidence.
- It could also open up new and updated frameworks including the social context.

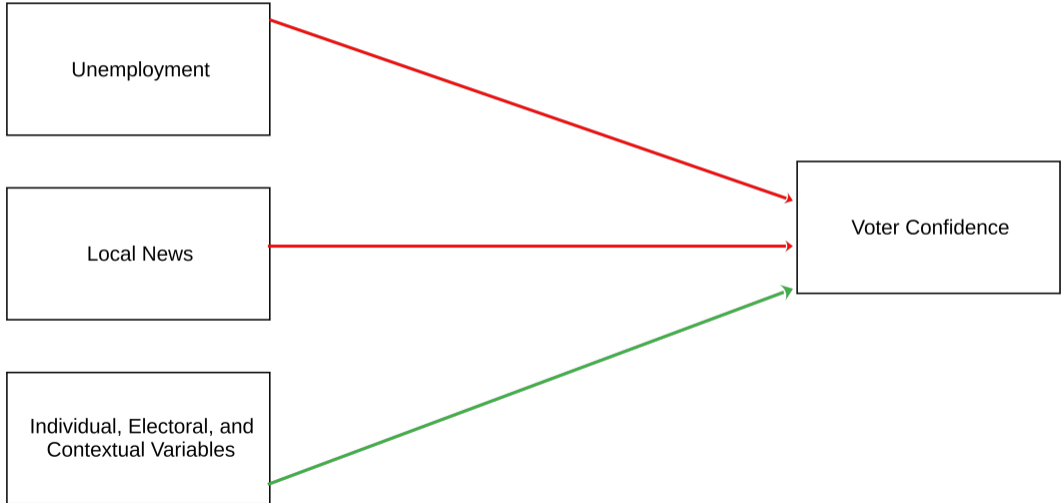
Preview of Findings

- Local economic conditions (unemployment) has a negative effect on voter confidence. It also moderates the effect of household-level economic conditions (median income) on voter confidence.
- Local news have a positive effect on voter confidence.
- Local news acts as a counterweight to unemployment, effectively nullifying its effect on voter confidence.

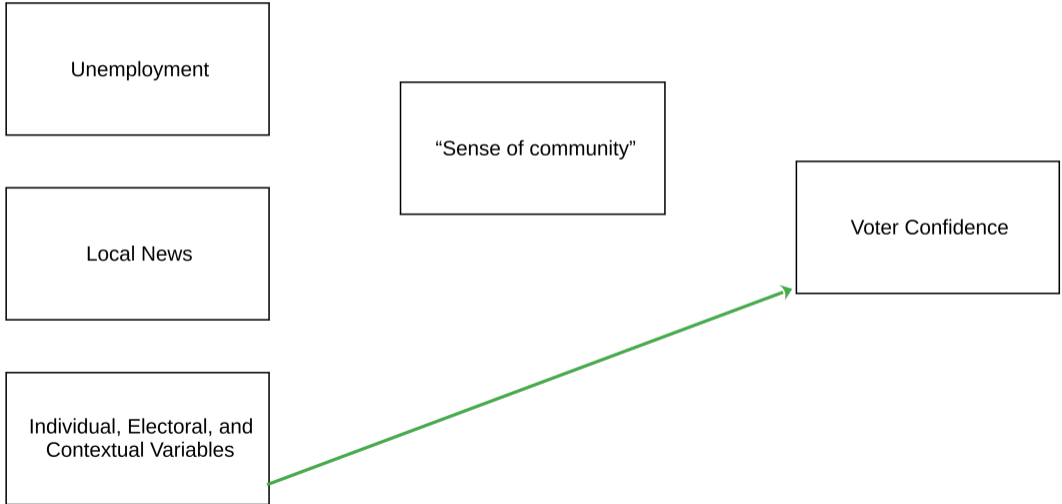
Our Argument



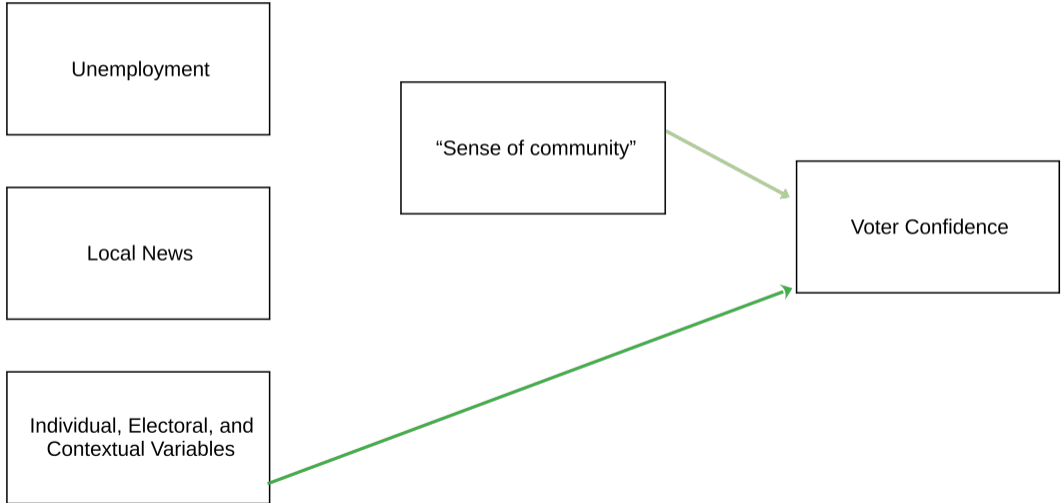
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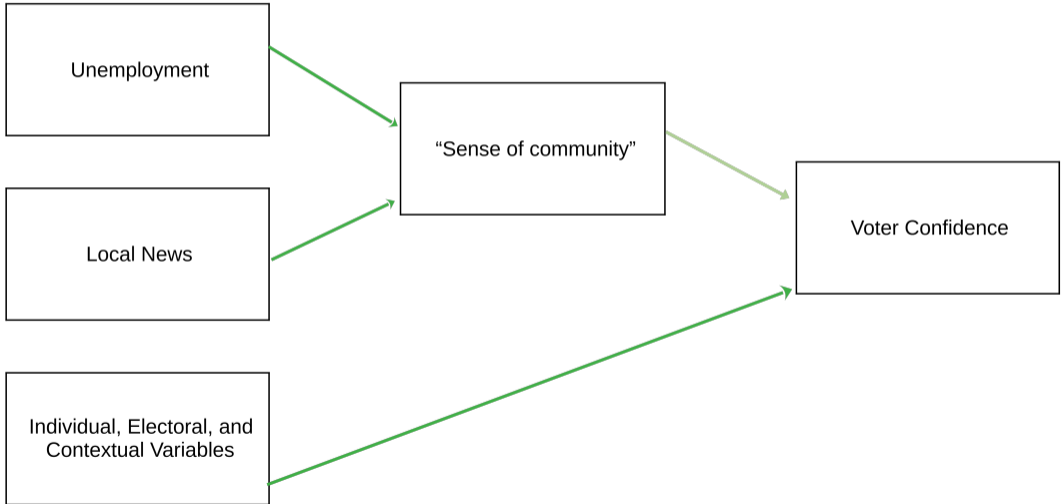
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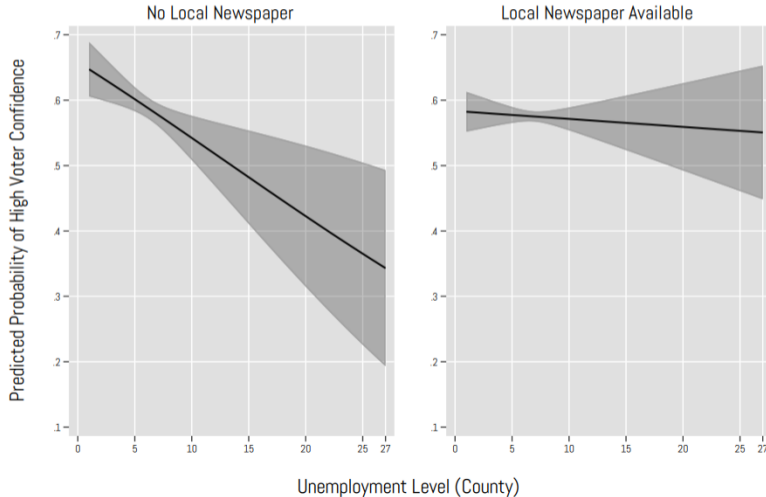
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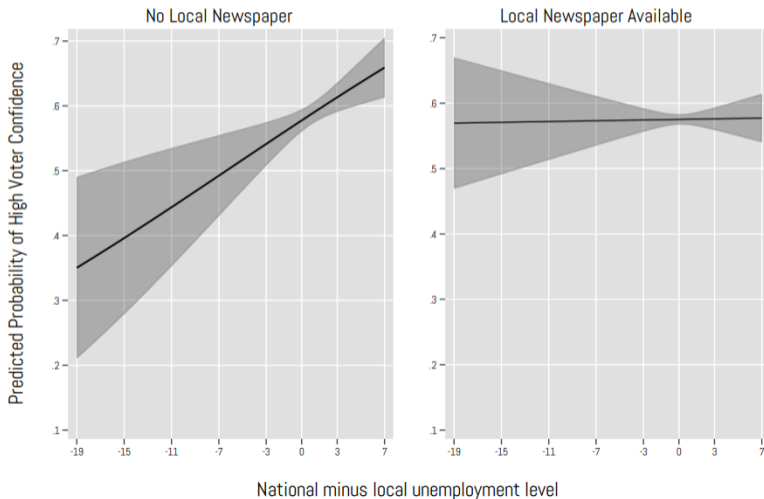
Data

- Data on universe of local newspapers
- Unemployment, median hh income, ideology estimates, and county population
- Individual data from SPAE surveys, $N=37,579$
- Covering 2012, 2016, and 2020 elections

Analysis & Findings



Analysis & Findings



Conclusion

- Economic conditions have a substantive effect on voter confidence. Local news have a dramatic impact on countering the deleterious effects of economic factors on voter confidence.
- Local news' continuing decline needs to be factored in election science studies.
- There is utility in bringing the social context in election science studies.

Thank you!
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